What is Religion?

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I

At present it is almost meaningless to discuss religion in the context of religion alone. Many people have no interest in religion, and gaining in strength are standpoints that negate religion not simply on the basis of personal feelings but philosophically in terms of basic principles. Given the presence of various *a*religious and *anti*religious standpoints, to discuss religion as something axiomatic is to talk idly in ignorance of the present historical situation and, contrary to what one might expect, to lose sight of the very *raison d'être* of religion. From time to time thinkers have raised the issue of the nature of religion, of its essence and *raison d'être*. Philosophy of religion in the modern West has been concerned primarily with addressing this issue. Never has the need to investigate the essence of religion been so urgent, for never before have people so lost sight of the essence of humanity and fallen so deeply into alienation and disunity.

The publication of Nishitani Keiji's *What is Religion?* is highly significant in this situation. As Nishitani writes in the Preface, his orientation throughout the book is "the quest . . . for the 'ground' of religion, where religion emerges from the human, as a *subject*, as a self living in the present."[1] He engages in this pursuit on the basis of a penetrating analysis of the existential situation of modern humanity.

*This is a shortened version of a review of Nishitani's *Shūkyō to wa nanika* (What is Religion?). It was first published in Japanese in *Tetsugaku Kenkyū* (Philosophical Studies), #483, 1962, shortly after the appearance of Nishitani's work. The translation was done by Christopher A. Ives.

[1] Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, tr. by Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. xlviii. Henceforth, all page numbers refer to this translation, portions of which have been adapted.

In this essay I examine the sense in which Nishitani's book is epoch-making and the place it occupies in the history of thought. I also set forth what I consider its fundamental standpoint and several doubts concerning points that challenge my comprehension.

II

Writing *What is Religion?* in the latter half of the twentieth century, Nishitani had aims similar to those of Schleiermacher when he wrote *Über die Religion* at the end of the nineteenth century. For the benefit of the "cultured despisers" of religion, Schleiermacher sets forth the basis of religion and clarifies the unique truth of religion, which diverges from that of metaphysics or morality. He argues that "to be religious is to intuit the Universe," and that it is only in religion that we make contact with the infinite, with the deepest reality of the universe. In this way he conceives of religion as a "higher realism." Given Nishitani's attempt to grasp religion from the perspective of a "real self-realization of reality," his book demonstrates an affinity to *Über die Religion*.

Nevertheless, Nishitani's standpoint and the situation he confronts differ greatly from the standpoint and situation of Schleiermacher. From within the Western European Christian tradition Schleiermacher attempts to clarify the essence of religion in response to the Enlightenment climate of the time, to the trend of idealizing that which is realistic and individual and reconstituting it as something universal. Confronting the problematic state of the contemporary "world," Nishitani attempts to clarify the essence of religion for modern cultured people. These people, baptized in the waters of scientific thought, Marxism, and nihilism, do not so much "despise" religion as stand totally *indifferent* to it or perhaps even *negate* it. Accordingly, faced not with Enlightenment trends but with the mechanical perspective of modern science and the atheistic standpoint of nihilism, Nishitani confronts them head-on and thereby seeks "the 'ground' of religion, where religion emerges from the human." (p. xlviii) "Reality" as that *ground* is conceived of as "emptiness" (śūnyatā). In the Preface, Nishitani writes,

> The inquiry into religion attempted here proceeds by way of problems judged to lie hidden at the ground of the historical

> frontier we call "the modern world," with the aim of delving into the ground of human existence and, at the same time, searching anew for the wellsprings of reality itself. In so doing, I place myself squarely in a no-man's-land straddling the realms of the religious and the *anti*religious, or *a*religious . . . in a realm whose borders shift unevenly. (p. xlviii)

With this aim Nishitani articulates how the Asian standpoint of "emptiness" is the standpoint of true reality to which modern humans must turn, and in this respect it can be deemed epoch-making.

The second sense in which Nishitani's work is epoch-making concerns Heidegger. Insofar as Nishitani writes that "the inquiry into religion attempted here proceeds by way of problems judged to lie hidden at the ground of the historical frontier we call 'the modern world,' with the aim of delving into the ground of human existence and, at the same time, searching anew for the wellsprings of reality itself" (p. xlviii), the book inevitably confronts Heidegger's philosophy. Here and there Nishitani touches upon Heidegger's thought, but he does not offer a direct critique of Heidegger. Of course, this does not indicate that Nishitani is indifferent to him or that he agrees with his philosophy just as it is. Quite to the contrary. In a certain respect one can regard Nishitani's book as engaging in an out-and-out confrontation with Heidegger and going at least one step beyond his standpoint.

If one were to look in Heidegger's thought for the closest equivalent of *kū* (śūnyatā or "emptiness"), one would probably discover Sein; the comparable term to *shōki* ("the emergence of a thing into its nature") is *Ereignis*; and the parallel concept to *egoteki sōnyū* ("circuminsessional interpenetration") is *Zusammengehören*. Heidegger sets forth his notion of *Ereignis* as that which gives an inner reality to the "same [thing]" (*dasselbe, das Selbe*) in Parmenides' proposition, "Being and thought are the same [thing]." To Heidegger, being and thought fundamentally *ereignen* or emerge together; they do not exist independently of each other but, breaking beyond all designations of metaphysics, are ecstatically and mutually yielding (*übereignen*) and in their original being (*Wesen*) are self-presenting (*anwesen*). It is here that Being and thought have their interdependence (*Zusammengehörigkeit*).

To Heidegger, a leap (*Sprung*) is necessary in the return of Being and

thought to *Ereignis* as their interpenetration (*Zusammengehören*). Heidegger views *Ereignis* as "the domain which revolves within itself" (*der in sich schwingende Bereich*) and argues that it is from here that Being first appears as Being and thought first appears as thought. In *Ereignis*, Being and thought possess their respective *Wesen*, emerge together, and mutually yield (*übereignen*) and interpenetrate (*Zusammengehören*). This is similar to Nishitani's construing the circuminsessional relationship between things as being possible only in the standpoint of emptiness and as being the emergence of a thing into its nature in the field (*ba*) of emptiness, the standpoint indicated in Nishitani's statement that "each thing in its being enters into the ground of every other thing, is not itself and yet precisely as such (namely, as located on the field of śūnyatā) never ceases to be itself." (p. 150) Moreover, in Heidegger, *Ereignis* is understood as the *Ereignis* of itself. Accordingly, the *Sein* that Heidegger takes as fundamental is absolutely unobjectifiable, and in that sense it is a *Sein* that contains negation and nothingness. However, it does not have the nature of *qua/non* (is/not; *sokuhi*) of "being-*qua*-nothingness, nothingness-qua-being" ("being-*sive*-nothingness, nothingness-*sive*-being").

In contrast to Heidegger, Nishitani's standpoint of emptiness thoroughly possesses the character of *qua/non*. This is the standpoint of true Emptiness, in which even "emptiness" is emptied. For this reason, "the field of ecstatic transcendence of the subject," just as it is, is turned "to the standpoint of śūnyatā as the absolute near side where emptiness is self." (p. 151) Here each and every thing manifests itself just as it is (i.e., manifests itself truly while being a provisional manifestation), and knowledge is considered "phantom-like," (p. 160) in that "the reflective knowledge whereby the self knows itself and objects is also made possible by the fact that the self in itself is a not-knowing." (p. 156) In other words, the standpoint of emptiness, which establishes all "Being" as "Being" from its bottomless depths, is the standpoint of "suchness insight," in which we know all things such as they are. "To know things such as they are is to restore things to their own ground." (p. 162)

In this way, Nishitani's standpoint of emptiness identifies "Being" and "knowing" in terms of *qua/non* (*sokuhi*), and regards that identity as the "True Self," which is the absolute near side. This standpoint of emptiness goes a large step beyond Heidegger's standpoint, which,

though resting on *Sein*, lacks the character of *qua/non*.

A third point is that Nishitani's standpoint of emptiness does not appear out of nowhere, for it is part of the tradition of the philosophy of Absolute Nothingness initiated by Nishida and Tanabe. In fact, Nishitani occasionally uses the expression "Absolute Nothingness." However, he espouses his own perspective as the standpoint of "emptiness," rather than relying on the expression, "Absolute Nothingness." Why does Nishitani draw a line of demarcation between himself and Nishida and Tanabe? Although this issue is beyond the scope of this essay, one factor can be mentioned here. As the inescapable problems of subjective nihility, Nishitani investigates the problem of the nihility opened up in humans by science and the problem of nihilism since Nietzsche. And it is as the complete overcoming of the standpoint of nihility that Nishitani formulates the standpoint of "emptiness." Although Nishida and Tanabe took the problem of science seriously, for them it was as a problem of cognition or logic, not of nihility. Because of its mechanical world view, Nishitani treats science as a problem connected profoundly with views of God, that is, as the problem of atheism that opens up nihility at the base of God. Further, Nishitani thoroughly investigates the problem of "nihility" in conjunction with Nietzsche's positive nihilism and the atheistic standpoint "subjectivized" by Sartre and others. This is not the case with Nishida and Tanabe, and this is why, while belonging to the school of the philosophy of Absolute Nothingness, Nishitani diverges from the philosophy preceding him and grants his standpoint a certain uniqueness and originality.

III

Nishitani's book also bears epoch-making significance in the area of philosophy of religion. Nishitani writes, "Insofar as religion is being treated as a whole, I do not intend to base myself on the tenets or doctrines of any religion in particular." (p. xlviii) Given that he thus investigates religion as religion, his writing "may be said to follow the lead of previous philosophies of religion." (p. xlix) To Nishitani, however, all philosophies of religion until now "have based themselves on something 'immanent' in the human such as reason or intuition or feeling." (p. xlix) But, "it has . . . become impossible to institute such

a standpoint, given the nature of the questions that have . . . given rise to the thought of the later Schelling, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, or even Feuerbach or Marx, and, above all, because of the appearance of positions like the nihilism of Nietzsche." (p. xlix) With this historical backdrop, the considerations in the book "take their stand at the point where traditional philosophies of religion have broken down or been broken through." (p. xlix)

Modern Western philosophies of religion strive to formulate rationally the universal "essence" common to various religious traditions. Operative here is the creative intention to free religions from their insular doctrines and specific historical character and to grasp them in the context of universal human religiosity. After Hegel—as the apex of such philosophy of religion—the abstractness and ideality of such philosophy of religion, as well as doubts about the metaphysics behind this freeing of religions from specificity, led to a decline in such philosophy of religion and to a split into two strands: first, the general study of religion and the study of the history of religions, which engage in comparative study of existing religions from the outside à la positivism; and second, theologies that hole up in particular religions and emphasize the uniqueness of the religions.

The positivistic and historical study of the various existing religious traditions and engrossment in the particularity of specific religions tend either to fix the eyes only on the past or to foster a closed-minded, intolerant attitude toward other religions. At present, theology has become more flexible and open, and once again we need a philosophy of religion that investigates the universal essence of religion and unearths new possibilities for the present and future. Under the title *What is Religion?* Nishitani avoids taking an approach that "analyzes the range of phenomena that characterize the various historical religions and explains the universal traits of what we call religion" (p. xlvii); rather, he takes an approach in which

> the fundamental meaning of religion—what religion is—is not to be conceived in terms of what it has been. Our reflections take place at the borderline where understanding of what has been constantly turns into an investigation of what ought to be; and, conversely, where the conception of what ought to be never ceases to be a clarification of what has been. (p. xlviii)

As an existential being living in the modern age, Nishitani takes the creative attitude of looking from the present to the future.

In this inquiry Nishitani rejects imitation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies of religion that seek the universal essence common to all religions. To him, the pervasive influence of the mechanistic world view based on modern science and the emergence of the active nihilism through which one endures nihility without God make it impossible to articulate the essence of religion in terms of anything "immanent" to humans, such as reason, intuition, or feeling.

Nishitani focuses on the place where the standpoint of traditional philosophies of religion has broken down and the "immanence" in human beings has been broken through. This place is "emptiness," in which impersonal personality—or personal impersonality—is established and the double-exposure of life and death truly becomes possible. Nishitani writes,

> In the past most religions tended to be motivated solely by human interests, by the questions of the "human." Their basis was, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, "human, all too human." This comes as no surprise—religion has to do with human salvation. But being concerned with human salvation is different from concluding that the enabling ground of salvation lies within the realm of human interests. (p. 49)

In this way he emphasizes breaking through the standpoint of self-consciousness, that is to say, of self-centeredness, personality-centeredness, and anthropocentricity. He goes beyond the standpoint in which things are seen as objects and represented by consciousness, the anthropocentric standpoint that excludes impersonal nature and inanimate materiality. He sets forth the standpoint of emptiness, in which "each and every thing presents itself in its own suchness." (p. 106) And he stresses that it is on the basis of such a standpoint of emptiness that religion as "human salvation" truly comes into being.

Accordingly, Nishitani's standpoint of emptiness breaks beyond not only the framework of past philosophies of religion, but also the frameworks of Christianity and Buddhism. For this reason, his standpoint of "emptiness" is neither simply the Buddhist śūnyatā explicated by Buddhologists nor simply a concept of Buddhism as a religion distinct from Christianity. As one who tries to "take a stand at one and

the same time within and without the confines of tradition" (p. xlix), Nishitani endeavors to set forth the standpoint of emptiness as the foundation of religion that ought to exist hereafter, and this endeavor encompasses the negative factor of the breakdown of the standpoint of past philosophies of religion and his positive conviction that world religions have the capability of developing anew.

But this does not mean that Nishitani is advocating some sort of new world religion. Rather, he is trying to realize—more than it has been realized by historical religions in the past—the fundamental religious life that is rooted in the very essence of human beings, to inquire into the universal "root source" of religion, which is not "religious" in the usual sense. This areligious ground of religion is none other than the standpoint of emptiness. Accordingly, to stand in the standpoint of emptiness is not merely to break beyond the frameworks of *past philosophies of religion*, but to break beyond the frameworks of *religions* themselves.

In contrast with Bultmann's advocacy of *Entmythologisierung* in an attempt to demythologize Christianity, Nishitani aims at *Entreligiosierung* in an attempt to uncover the ground of religion and "dereligionize" religion. For Bultman, demythologizing is primarily a hermeneutical issue, whereas "dereligionizing" is not a hermeneutical issue but the subjective event of breaking through all self-centered standpoints and standing in the standpoint of emptiness. This is what Nishitani indicates in the Preface when he writes that "the quest is for the 'ground' of religion, where religion emerges from the human, as a *subject*, as a self living in the present." (p. xlviii) This is the most important sense in which the book is epoch-making.

IV

Nishitani's book demands a conversion of one's everyday way of being from a self-centered standpoint that asks, "What is the purpose of religion for me?" to a standpoint that asks, "For what purpose do I myself exist?" Only through the religious demand that emerges in the occasion of this conversion can one legitimately inquire into the essence of religion, and Nishitani attempts to do so from the angle of "the self-realization of reality, or, more concretely, the *real* self-realization

of reality." (p. 5) Accordingly, that which forms the keynote of the book is precisely this *real* self-realization of reality.

With the expression "*real* self-realization of reality," Nishitani is implying two things: "our realization of reality" and "the reality realizing itself in our realization." (p. 5) He uses the English term realization to express this, and also uses such terminology as "realization-*qua*-appropriation" and "manifestation-*qua*-apprehension." This corresponds to Heidegger's grasp of *Denken des Seins* in the double sense of thinking about Being and Being itself thinking. Several points call for a word of caution here. First, Nishitani stresses that his "realization" is not a theoretical cognition but a "real embodied-obtaining," an "appropriation." Second, "the real perception of reality is our real mode of being itself." (p. 6) In other words, our ability to perceive reality is precisely reality's realizing itself in us, and "the self-realization of reality can *only* take place by causing our existence to become truly real." (p. 6) In what sort of place (*ba*) is the "*real* self-realization of reality" established? It is the place of emptiness, which is distinguished from the place of life, the place of consciousness, or the place of nihility.

It is impossible in a short essay to summarize all the problems Nishitani considers through his penetrating insight, so next I will simply discuss the three central problems constituting the book, each of which concerns the "*real* self-realization of reality."

The first is the problem of the impersonal personality, or personal impersonality, found in religion. The notion of impersonal personality appears clearly in Nishitani's earlier work, *The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity*,[2] but in this present work Nishitani links it up with his critique of Christianity and his suggestions of new possibilities for the development of Christianity on the basis of the problems of the encounter between science and religion and especially of the modern atheism that has resulted from that encounter. In the premodern teleological view of nature, God and nature (inclusive of the human) were seen as existing in harmony. When modern science introduced the mechanistic view of nature, nature came to be conceptualized as

[2] The original Japanese title is *Kongenteki shutaisei no tetsugaku*, published by Kōbundō, Tokyo, 1940. See p. 172 and p. 210.

something beyond the framework of divine order and hence contradictory to a personal God; and subjectivity, now broken beyond the framework of divine order, came to exist in the freedom of living in nihility. To transcend atheism as the result of modern science, Nishitani perceived the need to reexamine the concept of "personality" as it pertains to God and humanity.

Nishitani argues that the Christian view of God includes two heterogeneous elements: the perfection of God who empties Himself and loves all things non-differentiatingly, and the personality of God who makes choices on the basis of absolute will. Nishitani argues that traditionally the latter aspect of God has been stressed while the former has commanded little attention. (pp. 58–60) He states that God's perfection as the source of non-differentiating love transcends God's so-called personal character and has a character of "impersonal personality," and it is here that he discerns new possibilities for the development of Christianity. At the same time, he argues that Eckhart's notion of the "Nichts" (nothingness) of the *Gottheit*, arrived at by penetrating human subjective self-awareness and free autonomy to their limits and thereby realizing a trans-personal aspect to God, suggests a way of overcoming modern nihilism. In the nothingness of *Gottheit*, the being of God and the being of the human are both ekstatic (self-extricating) and can subjectively become "one."

For that impersonal personality to be established in the true sense, however, the direction from being to nothingness in that ekstasis must shift to the direction from nothingness to being. Needed here is the standpoint of the shift from absolute-affirmation-qua-negation to absolute-negation-qua-affirmation. (p. 68) This shift is recognized by Eckhart, who states that "God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground." That which opens up in the depths of this shift is the personality that is the "formless form" (the form of non-form), the personality that "is constituted at one with absolute nothingness as that in which absolute nothingness becomes manifest." (p. 71) In other words, it is the person or personality that becomes manifest in the place of emptiness.

The second and perhaps most central problem Nishitani addresses is the standpoint of emptiness, which is distinguished from the standpoint of nihility and transcends nihility. At the extreme point of the mechanization of the human through science, nihility is opened up at

the foundation of the human and the world, and this nihility is realized as something which "nihilizes" the foundation of God as well. The standpoint of modern nihilism comes forth in the contention that humans can be truly autonomous and free only by standing decisively in the abyss of nihility. Although nihility is subjectivized there, given the way the "abyss" of nihility is discussed, nihility is seen from the side of self as something appearing external to the self's being. Remaining here are the vestiges of the standpoints of representation and self-centeredness. In order to stand in a truly free and truly subjective standpoint, one must take a step beyond such a standpoint of nihility and stand in a place that lies even closer to the side of the self than the self's ordinary being does. This is the standpoint of emptiness as distinguished from nihility. Because "emptiness in the sense of śūnyatā is emptiness only when it empties itself even of the standpoint that represents it as some 'thing' that is emptiness," (p. 96) emptiness is not seen as something *outside* of "being," but rather is realized as identical with being, as forming a self-identity with it. Accordingly, "what we have called the abyss of nihility can only be constituted in emptiness." (p. 98)

Nishitani's articulation of the standpoint of emptiness transcendent of nihility reflects the intensity and depth of his experience and speculation—his own long years of engrossment in awareness of nihility and his breakthrough to the standpoint of emptiness. He designates the standpoint of emptiness as the place where the inseparability of life and death, being and nothingness, is established; as the place where personality as reality manifests itself just as it is; as "the place of absolute life-qua-death"; as "the absolutely transcendent this-side" that is identical with the absolutely transcendent other-side; as the "in itself" (*jitai*) distinguished from both substance (*jittai*) and subject (*shutai*); as the place in which all things dispersed and dismantled in nihility are once again restored to being; as the place of beification or *Ichtung*; as "the place of great affirmation"; as the "place of power" in which all things in their "being" are absolutely unique while arising together collectively as a one. Further, the way of being of things in the place of emptiness is designated as "samadhi-being" in that all things exhibit an "in itself" way of being as if in samadhi; as "middle" in that each thing is true being precisely as provisional manifestation and provisional manifestation precisely as true being; as "Position" in that all

things are self-establishing in their original position; as "circuminsessionally interpenetrating" in that all things stand in a relationship in which they are simultaneously master and attendant to each other; and also as "thus-thus" (*nyo-nyo*), "phantom-like *qua* true-suchness" (*nyogen soku nyojitsu*), and "primal fact" (*genponteki jijitsu*). Space does not permit detailed consideration of these expressions, but suffice it to say that with Nishitani śūnyatā is for the first time articulated existentially and philosophized in close connection—and confrontation—with Western philosophical thought.

The third central problem of the book is the issue of the relationship between the standpoint of emptiness and historicity, the form historicity has assumed in that standpoint, and the form it ought to assume. Given that thinkers before Nishitani almost never addressed the issue of the historicity of emptiness, the final two chapters of the book, "Śūnyatā and Time" and "Śūnyatā and History," are quite valuable. Here Nishitani's original speculation shines forth and his argumentation brims with power and vitality.

Nishitani begins his discussion of the problem of "time" with the argument that existence in the manner of "dropped off body-and-mind," that is, existence as true emptiness, is existence as the fullness of true time. He then asks himself "whether the various basic views of history that have so far appeared in the West do, in fact, exhaust the possible standpoints for looking at history." (p. 201) He directs his attention to the Christian eschatological view of history, to the progressive view of history that appeared during the Enlightenment in response to the Christian view, and to the view of history set forth by Nietzsche, who rejects the first two views and advocates eternal recurrence in their stead. Nishitani clarifies that in the West "the problems of time and eternity, of the historical and the transhistorical, in the end always come to be combined with the concept of will" (p. 236), and divine will, human will, and the will to power are viewed as *something* called "will" that functions at the base of history. In this respect, these various wills, including Nietzsche's, still carry a connotation of being "other" to us, and hence to Nishitani these Western views of history do not completely account for the historicity of that which is truly historical.

Nishitani acknowledges that history only comes into being in the standpoint of a self with a self-centered personality, i.e., in the stand-

point of the will. He argues that the Buddhist concept of karma implies both the beginningless and endless time spoken of in modern secularism since the Enlightenment, and a character of liberated, infinite drive. And it is precisely the standpoint of emptiness that abolishes and converts the self-awareness of nihility opening up infinitely at the ground of "karma from time past without beginning." Nishitani stresses that it is in such a standpoint of emptiness that the historicity of that which is historical is first truly and fully realized, for that standpoint is the standpoint of bottomless existence, which is established in the bottomlessness transcending—through absolute negation—the standpoint of "will" that lies at the base of self-centeredness in its various forms, and it is also the standpoint of the complete conversion to the true self, the self that is no self. For this reason, there is nothing in the trans-historical dimension represented as "something," and time is disclosed bottomlessly as time and history is revealed bottomlessly as history in their original forms. Further, the self in the place of emptiness, the self that has died and gained new life with "time" as the place of conversion (metanoia or *paravritti-vijñāna*), is an existence emerging from bottomlessness into its own nature; and as such its self-realization is the realization of the knowing of non-knowing, and its function, as the action of non-action, is fundamentally *Ernst* (seriousness) while simultaneously a fundamental disportment. Further, its *Dasein* is truly a non-duality of self and other, and it possesses compassion. It is along these lives that Nishitani argues that only in the standpoint of emptiness can the historicity of history be established.

V

Reflecting on the above outline of the three main problems Nishitani considers in his book, I now offer several lingering doubts about Nishitani's approach. My first doubt concerns the standpoint of impersonal personality and the problem of sin. As mentioned above, "impersonal personality" and "personal impersonality" manifest themselves as "the formless form" (the form of non-form) in the place of emptiness. Therein the human as personality presents himself or herself identical with absolute nothingness as that in which absolute nothingness becomes manifest. Recognizing the necessity of reexamining the

idea of personality, Nishitani sets forth his notion of personality as a new view based on the religion that "ought to be." In this regard, he tends to emphasize the ideas of the perfection of God at the ground of the personal God's love, for it has a character of impersonal personality and—in conjunction with an existential interpretation of God's omnipresence and omnipotence—it opens up an avenue for developing new Christian possibilities. This necessity for a rethinking of the idea of personality derives from the problem of overcoming the nihility realized through modern science's mechanistic view of nature, the nihility that extends to the field of God's existence.

In Christianity, God's "personality" links fundamentally with the problems of human sin as rebellion against the will of God and God's love as the forgiveness of that sin. For this reason, to raise the issue of impersonal personality is to raise the problem of sin, as evidenced by Nishitani's book (pp. 27–30, 44–5, 92). In Nishitani's discussion, however, sin is grasped ultimately in terms of "nihility" together with the problem of doubt.

But if, as he himself argues, sin and doubt are "instances of nihility appearing in the form of a 'spiritual' self-awareness at the ground of the self-conscious 'ego'," (p. 29) they need to be grasped in their respective particularity as "nihility in sublimated form, come to light in an existence aware of itself." (p. 92) That is to say, insofar as these factors are related to the issue of impersonal personality, the problem of sin (which in all respects concerns the will), must not be reduced along with the problem of doubt (which has an intellectual character) to the problem of nihility, but must be grasped in its own particularity. On the one hand, sin, like doubt, is rooted in human nihility; but on the other hand, it is the willful rebellion against the will of God. Given that Nishitani ultimately reduces sin to nihility and examines it as a problem of nihility, does he not omit the unique aspect of sin as rebellion against the divine will? Insofar as this is the case, the impersonal personality he arrives at may not be an "impersonal" personality in the true sense.

This relates to the fact that Nishitani barely considers Jesus Christ when he examines the perfection, omnipresence, and omnipotence of the Christian God. From the perspective of Christianity, these attributes of God must be grasped christologically. Only through Christ on the cross does God first truly engage in self-revelation and does a

human know God. Only through Christ on the cross does there emerge awareness of truly real *sin* and of *faith* as the conversion from sin. Accordingly, to discuss the problem of God's perfection and impersonal personality without any reference to Christ is to divorce that discussion from the problem of sin and faith.

God's impersonal personality enters Nishitani's discussion through a search for the reality of God transcendent of all types of nihility, that is, God as reality. To satisfy this search Nishitani sets forth Eckhart's notion of the nothingness of the *Gottheit* as the deepest standpoint in Christianity. Most people would probably acknowledge that there exists in Eckhart's thought a standpoint of God's own ecstatic reality, but when that standpoint is articulated in connection with impersonal personality, certain problems arise.

Eckhart discovers God's "essence" or *Gottheit* in the ground of the personal God. This nothingness of the *Gottheit* is the true, unobjectifiable reality of God. But at the same time, looked at from another direction, in Christ on the cross God became a more real God. In Christ's death and resurrection, the reality of God broke through nihility, overcame it, and became a reality of a higher dimension. In short, the "personal" God in Christianity is understood as entailing two directions in opposition to each other: 1) God's ecstatic self-transcendence in the direction of the nothingness of the *Gottheit*, and 2) God's self-revelation through self-negation in the direction of the more personal Jesus Christ. In terms of the human, the first direction is that of nothingness and autonomy, while the latter is that of sin and faith.

For God's personal impersonality and impersonal personality to be truly and fully discussed, both of these directions in God's "personality" must be examined simultaneously. And yet in Nishitani's book, the latter direction—the direction toward Jesus Christ—has been excluded, for the impersonal personality of God has been sought only in the former direction of the nothingness of the *Gottheit*. For this reason one is left with doubts about whether Nishitani has returned in the true sense to the "ground" of personality.

In order to work out correctly and adequately the new concept of personality that Nishitani terms impersonal personality or personal impersonality, the standpoint of emptiness must be set forth on the basis of thoroughgoing examination of not only the problem of doubt but also the problem of sin and faith. In other words, it is necessary to examine

the problem of personality and articulate the standpoint of emptiness through examination not only of the problem of "nihility and emptiness," but also of the issues of "sin and emptiness" and "faith and emptiness" ("sin" and "faith" here indicate the sin and faith realized in a radical form by such modern thinkers as Kierkegaard and Barth). In this regard, the notion of "Karma" discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of Nishitani's book can play an extremely important methodological role.

VI

My second doubt is about whether Nishitani has adequately distinguished nihilism as the result of science from Nietzsche's positive nihilism. Nishitani contends that the field of emptiness is the place where the conversion or "turning around" of absolute death-*qua*-life is established; and this field is not found merely in the direction of life (the direction of personality), which is the core of religion, or merely in the direction of death (the direction of materiality), which is the core of the scientific perspective in its most thoroughgoing form, but opens up in the intersection of these two directions. That is to say, it is a place realized "directly underfoot of the proper Form of things as life-qua-death and death-qua-life." (p. 94) Nishitani emphasizes that in both the direction of life and the direction of death the problematic situation is not simple; he points out that in the direction of life—which religion opts for—there is a leap through which sin as a high-order death is converted and one arrives at faith, and in the direction of death—where science stands—there is a leap in which one goes beyond nihility and meaninglessness and stands in nihilism realized in and through existence. Nishitani writes, "it seems to me that traditional religions spin on a life-oriented axis, while the line running from the scientific viewpoint to nihilism represents a death-oriented axis." (p. 93) Certain doubts arise in the present writer when Nishitani grasps science and nihilism together in the direction opposite to religion, when he grasps nihilism only as linked up with the viewpoint of science as the opposite of religion.

In his inquiry, Nishitani rightly points out that 1) the mechanistic view of nature that is based on science is not merely a problem of the world of science but at present a problem directly related to human existence and to views of God; 2) Sartre's existentialist atheism attempts

to stand decisively in nihility realized—because of science—at the base of humans and the world; and 3) the standpoint of Nietzsche's positive nihilism is likewise established in the encounter with modern science "after passing through the purgative fires of the mechanistic world view." (p. 57) In this regard, it is proper to grasp nihilism, inclusive of Sartre and Nietzsche, in the direction of science opposite the direction of religion. Yet even granting this, should we not treat Sartre's existentialist nihilism and Nietzsche's positive nihilism as two views with an essential difference? Should we not point out that Nietzsche's standpoint, the standpoint of the *Übermensch* who endures nihility without God and *tries to break* beyond God and nihility, is not merely passing through the purgative fires of science in the direction of science, but at the same time in one respect goes beyond God in the direction of religion?

Indeed, the nihility of the *Übermensch* who overcomes both God and nihility is a nihility realized on God's "far side," a nihility opening up at the very base of the living God and realized on the far side of God through a break beyond God. This radical nihilism of Nietzsche is not found in Sartre's nihilism, which declares that Existentialism is a form of humanism and creates an "image of man" (p. 32) in one's decision to stand in nothingness. Accordingly, if modern existentialist nihilism represented by Sartre is correctly located as a leap in the direction of science, in the direction of death together with science, then Nietzsche's positive nihilism must be located in a third standpoint beyond both the orientation linking up with science and the direction of religion.

Nishitani's lumping together of Sartre and Nietzsche is also seen in his contrasting of them with the standpoint of emptiness as the absolute other-side precisely because it is the absolute this-side, as "the point at which 0° means 360°." (p. 106) Nishitani argues that the Platonic and Christian standpoints are constituted on the far side in a 90° rotation toward the heavens, while the standpoint of nihilism as the abyss of nihility is constituted on the near side in a 90° rotation downward toward the underground region. In contrast to these two standpoints, the standpoint of emptiness "makes its appearance in a kind of 180° turn, as a field that simultaneously comprises both of the 90° turns of the formally opposing orientations upward to heaven and downward to under the earth." (p. 105) Moreover, "when the

standpoint of emptiness is radicalized—and the corresponding orientation is one in which emptiness itself is also emptied—this is like a 360° turn" (pp. 105–106), and ultimately "it is the point at which 0° means 360°." (p. 106) Here, too, in a comparison with the standpoint of emptiness, Nietzsche's standpoint of positive nihilism is grasped merely in the downward direction opposite to the direction of the Platonic realm of the Ideas and the Christian heaven.

The standpoint of Nietzsche's positive nihilism does not come forth in a downward transcendence opposite to an upward transcendence. Rather, is it not the standpoint of the enduring of nihility in an absolute life on earth, which transcends both directions? In terms of Nishitani's directional schema, it is not a standpoint involving a 90° turn downward, but a standpoint that "makes its appearance in a kind of 180° turn, . . . [which] simultaneously comprises both of the 90° turns of the formally opposing orientations upward to heaven and downward to under the earth." (p. 105) This is the aforementioned idea that Nietzsche's positive nihilism should be located as a third standpoint which is neither the orientation toward life (religion) nor the orientation toward death (science and nihilism).

In Nietzsche's positive nihilism, that is, in the standpoint of the *Übermensch* who overcomes God and nihility, there is definitely an aspect of transcendence of both the direction of God-sin and the direction of science-nihility, but this is not yet the standpoint of true emptiness. Nietzsche's standpoint resides in the standpoint of a 180° turn which must be emptied and negatively transcended in order to reach the standpoint of true emptiness, the standpoint of a completed 360° turn. Insofar as Nietzsche's "innocence of becoming"—even with an aspect that makes it similar to the standpoint of emptiness—is based on the "will to power," when viewed from the standpoint of true emptiness it is still a kind of "emptiness perversely clung to" and should be overcome.

Accordingly, with regard to the question of "nihility and emptiness," that is, in setting forth the standpoint of emptiness as the overcoming of nihilism, the most important thing is not the confrontation between the standpoint of emptiness and the abyss of nihility that emerges in a 90° turn, but the confrontation between the standpoint of emptiness and the positive nihilism that emerges in a 180° turn. In one regard, Nishitani's work does carry out such serious confrontation,

but in another regard, we discover a discordance in that Nietzsche's positive nihilism is grasped with Sartre's modern existentialist nihilism only with regard to science in a leap from the orientation upon which science rests. This is an area in which Nishitani's overcoming of nihility and presentation of the standpoint of emptiness as the basis of that overcoming is less than complete.

Although I have discussed two doubts that arose in my reading of Nishitani's book, several more remain. These doubts concern the problem of being and oughtness (*Sollen*) in the standpoint of emptiness and the issue of historicity in the standpoint of emptiness. Given the length constraints of this article, however, treatment of these doubts will have to wait for another opportunity.